

Byron L. Dorgan

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DORGAN SAYS NEW FEDERAL CRITERIA WILL MAKE MORE DEVILS LAKE ROADS ELIGIBLE FOR EMERGENCY FUNDING

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) --- U.S. Senator Byron L. Dorgan said Thursday that Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater has acted on the recommendations of a federal highway task force and moved to alter current regulations to allow the use of federal Emergency Relief (ER) funds to raise roads that have not yet been inundated by water in the Devils Lake region. Dorgan has pressed the federal agency to accept the proposed changes so that emergency funding could be used to protect transportation arteries in and around the lake.

A task force dealing with the highways in the Devils Lake basin was put together earlier this year at Dorgan's recommendation. A representative of Secretary Slater worked with that task force, which made recommendations to change the current regulations so that preventative work could be done with ER funds even before roads are flooded.

"This is a significant step forward in addressing the overwhelming need to upgrade the existing road structure in the Devils Lake area," Dorgan said. "A change in the current regulations allows us to raise road levels before flooding actually occurs and so preserve the flow of commerce, travel and emergency services in the region."

Devils Lake roads will now be eligible for ER funding if there is a 50 percent probability of water level reaching three feet of inundating the road surface. The change applies only to closed-lake basins such as Devils Lake and becomes effective immediately.

Since Devils Lake flooding began in the early 1990s, the federal Department of Transportation has spent more than \$80 million to repair and rebuild roads in the Devils Lake area.

Dorgan, who is a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said he is now working to secure funding to clear up a backlog of emergency road repairs, including those at Devils Lake. "Now that we know these roads will be eligible, our next step is to secure additional funding through the appropriations process," he said.

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